

Blister Pack

DAVID MCCOOEY was born in 1967 and has lived in Australia since 1970. He is the author of the prize-winning critical work, *Artful Histories: Modern Australian Autobiography*. As well as a poet, he is one of Australia's leading poetry critics. He is a senior lecturer in literary studies at Deakin University and the associate editor of *Space: New Writing*.

Blister Pack

DAVID MCCOOEY



CAMBRIDGE

PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham, Cambridge PDO CB1 5JX United Kingdom

All rights reserved

© David McCooley, 2005

The right of David McCooley to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Salt Publishing.

First published 2005

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Lightning Source

Typeset in Swift 9.5 / 13

This book is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

ISBN 1 84471 052 1 paperback



Australian Government



This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

for Kate McCoey

Contents

PART I	1
Occupations	3
Questions in Philosophy	4
French with Tears	5
[1] Raison d'être	5
[2] Je-ne-sais-quoi	6
[3] Noblesse oblige	7
[4] Une blessure	8
[5] Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose	9
[6] À propos de rien	10
[7] Déjà vu	11
[7] Déjà vu	12
Signal-to-Noise Ratio	13
Evening	14
On Something	15
Circus Oz	16
The Developed World	17
Seen from a Train	18
Distance	19
Melbourne Cup Day	20
Late Summer: Sydney	21
Home Beautiful	22
Sunday Night	23
Grief	24
Garlands	25
What Light Is	26

Autobiographical	28
Metaphor	29
The Same River	31
The Story's End	32
His Hands	33
Left Hand	33
Right Hand	33
After a Line Abandoned by Chris Wallace-Crabbe	34
Boarding School	35
PART II	37
Domestic Elegies	39
What to do with the Evenings (i)	39
God	40
You'd come home at night	41
What to do with the Evenings (ii)	42
'We are dark water'	43
'Thinned out by age'	44
'You decided that'	45
'Their green desires'	46
Succedaneum	47
(i) 'If the message on the piece of paper'	47
(ii) Delight	48
(iii) Argument	49
(iv) Our Arguments	50
(v) 'You were always'	51
(vi) Bitch	52
(vii) 'Once I came home'	53
(viii) Love & Anger	54

Last Chances	55
(i) 'She scans her torch'	55
(ii) Love Poem	56
(iii) Diurnal	57
(iv) 'We catch our flights'	58
PART III	59
A Few Questions	61
Hours	62
A Perfect Heart	63
The Art of Happiness	69
1. Pointillism	69
2. Abstract Expressionism	70
3. Late Minimalism	71
Brief Lives	72
Singles	73
Covers	74
Manifest	76
Mid Life	77
Autobiology	78
Rubber Bullets	79
Ghostly	80
One moment please	81
Distance	82
The Last Summer	83
Facts of Life	84
The Field	85
Bird and Fox	86
Morning	88

Days	89
Hours	90
Night Fragments	91
PART IV	93
For Maria	95
For Maria	96
'It has no edges'	97

Acknowledgments

Poems in this collection have previously appeared in *Australian Book Review*, *The Age*, *Antipodes* (USA), *core*, *Poetry Review* (UK), *poetryetc* (online), *Southerly*, *Verse* (USA), and *Westerly*.

Long overdue thanks are due to the following for their advice and encouragement: Kevin Brophy, Justin Clemens, Laurie Duggan, Kevin Hart, Dennis Haskell, Paul Kane, John Kinsella, Anthony Lynch, Noel Rowe, Vivian Smith, Chris Wallace-Crabbe.

Thank you to Maria Takolander: ideal reader.

Part I

Occupations

Well, I don't live in London, but I
Might have been born there. There's something
To be said for silence; the houses
In Bendigo and Geelong that don't
Have anyone living above or below them.
The quietude of the margins is
Quite an illumination; though
Trucks from one part of the country
Are always passing through to another.

And there's my friend in New York City
Who used to look a bit like John Lennon.
Why do all the clever people leave home?
They only have to find a home somewhere else.
And people in flats are always playing
Sondheim or Sinead O'Connor at thoughtless
Hours of the night. This is what the suburbs
Were invented for: never having to leave home;
Where artists can occupy a Belgium of the mind.

Questions in Philosophy

After Keats

Asking questions for a living,
It's easy to forget their name.

We might ask: what is a question?
Questions are not questions until

They are asked of our pulses
When they are faint, or halting,

When the world outside the window
Needn't ask what day it is, or

What pre-dates the predator?
Or what belies the believable?

French with Tears

pour Robin et Virginia

[1] RAISON D'ÊTRE

Music must change, but cafés stay the same.
Her hair remained in place even though
Her nose was out of joint. Well, that was
One way of putting it. You cannot see
Your reflection in the Yarra-coloured
Coffee, but you begin to muse upon
The narcissism of acquired taste,
How even democrats can be born to rule,
That the virtue of marriage is based on vice,
And those with time to muse on time are lost
Or young or old or sick. How briefly we
Fit none of those descriptions. You pay with
Change, which renders time's percussive music.

[2] JE-NE-SAIS-QUOI

Three a.m. is the time for tragedies
Or parties (sometimes both). But when alone
It is a different kind of time, when Mind
Can glimpse its shadow, and entertain
Those moments of I-know-not-what: the sound
Of bells, or just after; the sight of clouds
Upon the milky page of childhood; the
Nostalgia of trains; and grappling with verbs.
And a moment, not for anything so
Unsubtle as revelation, but a
Stillness, of empty longing, homesickness
At home: echo of a question hitting
The walls of the well as it goes down, or
Else the mirror saying, 'I know not what.'

[3] NOBLESSE OBLIGE

They are always with us: in weekend houses,
Safe seats, high offices and cars. Vested
Interests, misrepresentation, even
Indifference: they have their obligations.
Perhaps there is a little voice asking
'Are you proud of your pride?' The question curls
Like smoke back into your eyes. You think:
'I am just a humble intellectual,
A simple man with complex dreams.' But there
Are thousands in high offices and cars,
All are humming to the obbligato
Of power, their minds as darkly lit as a
70s film, every one of their thoughts
As important as a supermodel.

[4] UNE BLESSURE

In the classroom it's all academic.
Books yawn upon the desks, eyes rest open.
In playgrounds boys will clutch their chests and say
'I'm hit,' or dream of walking with a limp.
Somewhere wars are being fought, or people
Being cut from broken cars. The hands
All taking notes in Physiology
Are steady, but do not think upon the
Future. All flesh is wounded by flesh, and
So is blessed as well. And in the classroom
You will look to see which clever student
Will know the link between 'to bless' and 'wound,'
And you will wonder if such things are learned
Or solely guessed within the bones, the breath.

[5] PLUS ÇA CHANGE, PLUS C'EST LA MÊME CHOSE

Lionized MPs explain to us the more
We have the more we are, but when things change,
Inevitably we are shown the more
We lose the more we know. MPs? they stay
In marginal seats for life, while the same
Papers and private schools are showing more
Of the imaginary, expensive things
Your child will need for all our lives to change.
Teachers and journos may not care anymore
That courtly life won't offer us a stay
In proceedings: each sentence is the same.
They too just grow older the more things change.
Lions tame in the zoo the more they stay,
But our children hope for blood, just the same.

[6] À PROPOS DE RIEN

Dabbing eau de Cologne behind your ears,
While Roger limps to the *bureau de change*
(He manages things, he's so *dégagé*)
You think of well-known ways to spend the cash.
'*Les jeux sont faits*' rings in those scented ears;
Computers whirr like loaded roulette wheels;
Tourists from New York enumerate their rights:
Travel always is a *rite de passage*.
Roger returns *avec* a *New Yorker* —
Inside's a piece on *fin de siècle* —
Suggesting you to take him to Paris
('*Paris vaut bien une masse*,' so we're told).
À *propos* of nothing, some trivial
Thought comes to you in French, tongue of *ennui*.